



# S.T.A.R.

Supporting Teens As Resources  
(A Youth Needs Assessment)

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## INTRODUCTION

The City of Riverside ***Focusing on the Vision Strategic Plan 2003/04***, Goal #5, calls upon “Increasing our investment in Youth and Children.” As stated, “Our children are powerfully influenced by the communities in which they live, learn and play. They need solid role models, mentors and places to go for healthy play when family members are unavailable. Teenagers and young adults, too, need this background support; but it is requisite that they are able to see a bright future, meaningful jobs, and a college education awaiting them upon graduation. We need to ensure that our community attitudes, job and leisure opportunities, and the general environment support the needs of all our young people. Moreover, any concerted strategic plan needs to directly involve youth in this change process.”

In addition, the Riverside Youth Action Plan calls upon *Riverside to become known as a “Family Friendly City, dedicated to nurturing families and supporting them in raising healthy, competent children.”* In order to achieve these goals it is important that we hold forums where youth can interact and discuss issues and concerns important to them; that their meetings bring them together centered around a specific issue or theme; and that the means of gathering youth views and possible solutions to guide municipal policies and planning be supported from local leaders to show youth that we value their opinions.

On June 28, 2003, the Office of Neighborhoods held their annual Neighborhood Conference, on the campus of University of California, Riverside. The Youth Action Collaborative in partnership with the Park & Recreation Department was invited to sponsor a youth track at the conference. This opportunity provided the foundation for launching a *Youth Needs Assessment* that directly involved youth in the process. With support from the Neighborhood Recreation Services Coordinators, over one-hundred and fifty (150) youth from neighboring communities of Riverside, gathered to take part in the *Youth Needs Assessment*. The assessment entitled S.T.A.R. (Supporting Teens as Resources) focused on specific issues and themes; 1) What Teens Like About

Riverside, 2) What are Teens Concerns About Riverside, 3) What Teens Need in order to succeed?

The Assessment provided an opportunity for youth to identify, analyze, and address problems or challenges that affect their lives. Similarly, it was an effective way to gather youth perspectives and input on local policies and programs. The needs assessment allowed youth's perspective on Riverside's strengths and weaknesses. It will allow us to set priorities and goals in identifying key gaps in services and programs in Riverside and will articulate the main issues affecting youth while developing community-based strategies aimed at improving the quality of life for the young people of Riverside.

This project was intended to serve as a preliminary tool that can help providers of youth services and programs ensure their efforts and resources are focused on the main issues affecting the quality of life for youth in Riverside.

The views and ideas of young people contained in this document are essential. It is important that youth know that their voices were heard and they are likely to look for follow-up steps based on their discussions.



# WHAT RIVERSIDE TEENAGERS LIKE ABOUT RIVERSIDE



Orange Groves



Clean



Less Crime



City's Expansion



Location



RTA Transportation



Weather



Schools



Neighborhoods



Churches



Quiet Places



Diversity



Friendly People



Family History



Unity



## WHERE TEENAGERS LIKE TO GO IN RIVERSIDE



Parks



Walmart



Downtown



University Village



Bookstores



Starbucks



Tyler Mall



Libraries



Movie Theaters



The Castle



Car Shows



Black History Parade



Orange Blossom Festival



# TEENAGERS CONCERNS ABOUT RIVERSIDE



Air Quality



Lack of Neighborhood Pride



Crowded Schools



91 Freeway



Lack of Teen Clubs



Youth Violence



Drug Dealers



Lack of Teen Events



Police/Probation



Graffiti



Lack of Teen Jobs



H.S. Afterschool Programs



Curfews



Speeding Cars



Lack of Bike Lanes



Racism



Gangs



Weapons



## WHAT RIVERSIDE 'S TEENS NEED TO SUCCEED

- Teen Activities
- Field Trips
- Extend Park Hours
- Basketball Gyms
- Co-cart Streets
- Safe Communities
- Longer Bus Hours
- Expand Store hours
- Friday Nights for Teens
- Younger staff for teen programs
- More teachers and counselors who Listen and help
- Jobs
- Clean Parks
- Role Models
- Riverside Plaza
- Teen Nights
- Weight Rooms
- Scholarship Programs
- Preparation for College
- Water Park
- Free Games
- More Entertainment
- Tagging Wall
- Respect
- Parenting Classes
- Teen Involvement





## THE BENEFITS OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Youth participation can mean anything from serving on a commission to organizing a community-wide litter pick-up. There is, in fact, no limit to what young people can do to serve their communities. Likewise, there is no limit to the benefits that youth involvement brings to young people and entire communities. These benefits include:

- ✚ Young people come to the table with a great deal of energy and innovative ideas.
- ✚ Young people are the foremost experts on their experiences, needs and interests. By involving them in local decision-making, local officials can tap into their knowledge and gain new insights into how to better serve the community's youth.
- ✚ When you empower youth to become involved in local decision-making, you often engage their parents as well.
- ✚ When you involve young people in decision-making and planning, they take ownership and pride.
- ✚ When you empower young people to help shape their community, they are more likely to grow up into adults who give back to the community.
- ✚ Research shows that the more positive activities young people are involved in, the less likely they are to be engaged in unhealthy and negative behaviors.
- ✚ Through civic participation and community service, young people can gain work experience, acquire new skills, learn responsibility and accountability; and forge meaningful connections between young people and adults.

Young people of varying backgrounds, beliefs and experiences long for opportunities to work together and share responsibility for improving their own lives and the lives of those around them. These are the people who will be in charge of our community after us. They are the ones who will continue our great work and carry on the initiatives we start. Young people make up 35% of Riverside's population, but they are 100 percent of our community's future!

*Prepared by the Riverside Youth Action Office*

